# Early Years and Youth Strategy 2015 - 18

# Contents

# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1 Introduction

Surf Coast Shire Council's Early Years and Youth Strategy 2015-18 is intended to guide the ongoing development and delivery of programs and services for young citizens during their formative years from birth to 25.

The process of developing the strategy involved:

- reviewing its predecessors, the Surf Coast Early Years Plan 2009-13 and the Youth Strategy 2006-09, as a key strategy of the Surf Coast Shire Council Plan 2013-17

- a three-pronged research approach, involving desktop research, demographic analysis and community consultation, which provided the strategy's operational and strategic context, and informed the development of its key themes

- meetings with Early Years and Youth staff members to discuss key findings and determine strategic directions, including goals, related strategies, actions and outputs

- briefings with Council and the Executive Management Team to seek feedback in relation to the directions outlined in the draft strategy, and

- a public exhibition process to seek community feedback.

## 1.2 Context

The strategy sits under the umbrella of the Council Plan 2013-17 and aligns with its themes, objectives and goals, as well as those of the Surf Coast Shire Council Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-17, and the Accessible and Inclusive Surf Coast Shire Strategic Plan 2014-24.

### 1.2.2 Operating environment

Change represents a key environmental factor. Internally, the organisation continues to evolve with the recent review of the organisation's long-term financial position. This may impact on future services and infrastructure provision.

The external environment is characterised by ongoing political and economic volatility, which influences Council's services approach. Population growth, changing demographics and urban development are contributing to significant changes in Surf Coast's sense of place with substantial social impacts, including increasing complexity in terms of community needs.

Early intervention, addressing vulnerability and building the capacity of families and communities are all critical to improving outcomes for children and young people.

### 1.2.3 Our community

Based on 2011 census data, children and young people represent close to one-third (31.9%) of Surf Coast Shire's total population with the early years (0-11 years) age group comprising 17.3 per cent and the youth (12-24 years) 14.6 per cent. Current total population forecasts indicate early years will grow 24 percent and youth 20 per cent between 2011 and 2018. At a township level, Torquay shows solid growth forecasts across all age groups while smaller townships (eg Anglesea, Aireys Inlet, Lorne, Deans Marsh) show little or no growth.

The community consultation identified getting around, knowing what's going on, responding to specific and/or increasingly complex needs, fostering children's and young people's physical and intellectual development, and supporting effective parenting as important issues.

## 1.3 Key themes

As outlined above, the research phase provided a solid understanding of the broader strategic context for the strategy and contributed to the identification of five key themes as critical areas for its focus: access, knowledge, connection, quality frameworks and change. These are reflected in the five key goals articulated in the next section.

## 1.4 A strategy to support young citizens in realising their full potential

The strategy articulates the following overarching strategic goal:

Working together, with our community, our partners and others to support Surf Coast Shire's young citizens in realising their full potential.

It also articulates a series of guiding principles – based on international, national and state protocols pertaining to 'age friendly' communities – which underpin the strategy's key goals and their implementation. These are: accessible and inclusive, safe and supportive, responsive, providing opportunities to participate, respect and dignity, diversity, and holistic.

### 1.4.1 Goals and guiding principles in action

The following table summarises the strategy's key goals and objectives.

# Goal 1
# ACCESS

**We make it easy for young citizens and their families to access what they need.**

## Objectives

1.1 Continue to develop and promote service access for early year's key developmental stages focusing on supporting parents to meet their children's wellbeing and development needs.

1.2 Pursue integrated service/information provision and intergenerational activities and programs.

1.3 Facilitate the ability of young citizens to access information, making it easier for them to get what they need.

1.4 Ensure Council's planning, community infrastructure and advocacy programs provide for young citizens' access needs.

## We will know we have succeeded when we see:

- effective partnerships and integrated service delivery across service providers
- intergenerational activities across the early years, youth and older age groups
- communication and engagement options aimed at young citizens embedded in the organisation, and
- young citizens and their family's needs represented in Council's advocacy efforts.

# Goal 2
# KNOWLEDGE

**We build and use knowledge to respond to the needs of young citizens and their families.**

## Objectives

2.1 Maximise use of available data to better inform services/program planning and delivery.

2.2 Continue to strengthen our interagency partnerships for early years and youth sectors to build industry knowledge, improve best practice and inform funding availability.

2.3 Consult and engage with children, the wider community and internal stakeholders to ensure the needs of young citizens and their families are reflected in Council's services and program planning.

2.4 Support services and program planning and delivery on an ongoing basis.

## We will know we have succeeded when we see:

- children's voices represented in broader communication and engagement processes
- interagency partnership approaches to funding and service planning
- increased use of data to inform service development, and
- regular reports and evaluation of projects, programs and services.

# Goal 3
# CONNECTION:
## We facilitate connections between young citizens, their families and the Surf Coast community.

### Objectives

3.1 Explore existing and new avenues within current services and programs for promoting community connections, including for people new to the area.

3.2 Actively work with local communities to facilitate initiatives encouraging connection/participation, including opportunities for intergenerational relationships.

3.3 Investigate ways of facilitating connections for people who are hard-to-reach/overlooked.

3.4 Continue to advocate ensuring all services and infrastructure support community connection.

### We will know we have succeeded when we see:

- increased community participation in early years and youth activities

- increased opportunities for intergenerational activities, and

- improved engagement with hard-to-reach groups.

# Goal 4
# QUALITY FRAMEWORKS:
## Our direct services and programs meet quality framework standards.

### Objectives

4.1 Ensure direct services and programs meet legislative requirements, funding agreement terms, best practice frameworks and industry standards.

4.2 Continue to improve governance arrangements, including regular reporting to Council, funding bodies and clients/community.

### We will know we have succeeded when we see:

- service improvement plans in place and regularly monitored

- assessment ratings achieved, and

- increased reporting to Council and the community on program and service achievements.

# Goal 5
# CHANGE
## We plan ahead to enable our services and programs to adapt to change.

### Objectives

5.1 Build organisational capacity to adapt to ongoing policy and sector reforms through effective planning.

5.3 Build organisational capacity to stay abreast of and respond to population growth, demographic and other significant changes (eg political, economic, social, technological).

5.2 Advocate on our community's behalf to ensure critical gaps in services/program provision and community infrastructure are adequately addressed.

### We will know we have succeeded when we see:

- service planning and development in response to demographic changes

- service reviews completed and informing future needs and opportunities for early years and youth, and

- successful advocacy for services, infrastructure and programs for our growing community.

## 1.5 Implementation

The strategy will be implemented via the annual action plan, which details the actions to be taken under each goal in line with Council's Strategic Resource Plan and annual budget. The Aged and Family Services Manager and Early Years and Youth Coordinator are jointly responsible for coordinating the strategy's implementation, with progress to be regularly monitored and reported, including via quarterly reports to the Executive Management Team and Council.

## 1.6 Communication and community engagement

A communications and community engagement plan will be developed and implemented for:

- the public exhibition/final consultation phase
- communicating Council's progress in implementing the strategy following its adoption by Council, and
- seeking community input to the strategy's review and evaluation process as the basis for its continuous improvement and further development.

## 1.7 Review and evaluation

As a living document, the strategy will be subject to ongoing review and evaluation against the specific measures in each annual action plan. Led by the Aged and Family Services Manager and Early Years and Youth Coordinator, the review outcomes will inform the development of an annual report to Council on overall progress towards achieving the strategy's goals and outcomes.

The review will also assist in identifying opportunities for improvement and key priorities for the year ahead as the basis for developing the annual action plan and for realigning strategies, if needed, to ensure their ongoing relevance.

# 2. Purpose

**Surf Coast Shire Council's Early Years and Youth Strategy 2015-18 provides a strategic framework to guide the ongoing development and delivery of programs and services for young citizens during their formative years from birth to 25.**

The strategy builds on previous strategies by charting the way forward for Council to achieve better outcomes for Surf Coast's children and young people over the next three years. As such, it forms the basis for developing annual action plans to ensure its implementation at the operational level.

# 3. Background

## 3.1    Council's role

Council's role in supporting its young citizens currently includes three main streams; service planning and delivery, advocacy and provision of infrastructure.

**Service planning and delivery –** includes the planning and implementation of a range of programs and services that support young citizens' wellbeing and development needs (ie physical, intellectual, social) during their formative years. Examples of the types of services provided include maternal and child health, early childhood education, childcare and youth development.

**Advocacy –** advocating on behalf of our younger citizens and their families to ensure their needs are considered in future planning at both a local and broader state and national level.

**Provision of infrastructure –** ensuring infrastructure planning and delivery supports children and young people in accessing and engaging in activities focused on contributing to their health and wellbeing, and enabling them to connect with others and realise their full potential. This can be in the form of designated spaces, such as playgrounds, skate parks, kindergartens and the like, but can also be extended to include accessible open spaces and other community facilities.

## 3.2    Strategic context

The *Surf Coast Shire Council Plan 2013-17* (adopted in June 2013) identifies the need to review several critical strategic documents, including the Surf Coast Early Years Plan 2009-13.

Adopted in 2009, this plan aligned with the previous Council's strategic priorities, as stated in the Council Plan 2008-12, and reflected relevant policy directions of the Victorian and Federal Governments of the time. Its implementation over the ensuing four years resulted in a range of improvements to Council's early years services. These included the transferral of the Vacation Care program to Early Years (from Recreation and Facilities) and the introduction of the Kindergarten Cluster program.

A new organisational structure in 2013 resulted in the Youth Development team moving across to Early Years to ensure greater synergy between services and activities for children and young people. At that time, while some work had started (in 2010) on developing a new youth strategy, it remained incomplete, which left the previous Youth Strategy 2006-2009 at least four years out-of-date.

In addition, the intervening years between both documents' development and implementation had seen policy shifts at Victorian and Federal Government levels, including in the key areas of early childhood development, childcare, education, health and wellbeing, youth employment and support services. These carried major implications for Council's capacity to plan and deliver its early years and youth programs.

With this in mind, a decision was made in mid-2014 to form a project team to oversee a redevelopment of three key Aged and Family Services strategy documents as identified in the Council Plan 2013-17. This would form the basis for developing a new three-year strategy, integrating early years and youth.

Importantly, the new strategy would closely align with Council's current strategic priorities and community aspirations. Consideration would also be given to the likely impacts of recent State and Federal Government policy directions, key environmental drivers (eg population growth, economic factors) and best practice.

A three-year time horizon for this strategy was agreed due to alignment with the development of the next Council Plan. This timeline will allow for investigation, planning and future decision-making regarding Council's ongoing role in supporting its young citizens

# 4. Research

**The strategy's development has been informed by the outcomes of an initial research phase in keeping with Council's evidence-based approach. Conducted between November 2014 and January 2015, this phase encompassed desktop research, demographic analysis and community consultation.**

The desktop research reviewed a broad range of relevant documents, including:

- Council's strategies, plans, policies and reports

- key Federal and State Government policy statements, performance frameworks, legislative requirements, strategies and reports

- information outlining strategic directions at the regional and broader local government level, and

- strategies recently published by other councils, particularly those considered best practice or sharing similarities with Surf Coast Shire.

Analysis of this information resulted in the overview of Surf Coast Shire's current internal and external operating environment described in Section 5. Appendix I provides a complete list of documents reviewed.

The demographic analysis used 2011 census data and recent population forecasts to ascertain key characteristics of Surf Coast Shire's early years and youth populations in 2015, and how these are likely to change over the next three years and through to 2031. This helped shape the community profile in Section 5.3. More detailed demographic data is contained in. Appendix II.

The community consultation sought to gain a better understanding of how children, young people and their families perceived Council's services in terms of meeting their specific needs and expectations. Various tools assisted in eliciting this information including client surveys, face-to-face meetings, workshops and dot posters.

The outcomes of this process, summarised in the next section and described in detail in Appendix III, supported the identification of key themes and issues to be addressed by the strategy, and offered important insights into our community's aspirations for its children and young people.

# 5. Context

**The research phase assisted in developing a detailed picture of Surf Coast Shire Council's current operating environment, encompassing internal, external and community factors. These are summarised below.**

## 5.1    Internal environment

The current Council is in the third year of its four-year term and remains focused on delivering the strategic priorities articulated in its four-year plan adopted in June 2013. This is expected to continue, at least until the next Council elections in late 2016, which will necessitate the development of a new Council Plan in 2017.

A review of Council's long-term financial position leading into budget preparations for 2015-16 may impact on pending and future budgets. The implications for services and infrastructure provision will become clearer upon the review's completion.

While the organisation has made progress in using technology to achieve efficiencies in some areas, there are opportunities to improve the way data and information technology are used to plan and deliver services and infrastructure to ensure better alignment with community needs.

Technology also offers scope to more effectively inform, communicate and engage with the Surf Coast community and others, although community feedback suggests current efforts often miss their intended targets, as evidenced by the high number of people reporting difficulty in finding information about services, community activities and the like.

### 5.1.1 Policy and planning context

Council's Early Years and Youth Strategy 2015-18 sits under the umbrella of the Council Plan 2013-17 and aligns with its themes, objectives and goals, as well as those of the Surf Coast Shire Council Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-17, and the Accessible and Inclusive Surf Coast Shire Strategic Plan 2014-24. Table 1 provides an overview of these documents' key themes and outcomes as they relate to this strategy.

| Council Plan 2013-17 | Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-17 | Accessible and Inclusive Surf Coast Shire 2014-24 |
|---|---|---|
| **Communities**<br>• Access to services and information according to need<br>• Access to opportunities to improve health and wellbeing<br><br>**Infrastructure**<br>• Accessible, well maintained facilities and infrastructure to meet diverse community needs<br>• Improved public transport options<br><br>**Environment**<br>• Accessible, well managed public open spaces<br><br>**Development and Growth**<br>• Environmental and lifestyle components reflected<br><br>**Governance**<br>• Accessible information, clear communication and opportunities to provide input<br>• Easy for customers to deal with Council and receive timely responses<br>• Advocacy | **Local opportunities**<br>• Improved capacity to achieve better outcomes for children, youth and older people<br>• Better understanding and use of community demographics<br><br>**Service accessibility**<br>• Equitable access to appropriate and timely services<br>• Infrastructure supports community participation and connectedness<br>• Improved response to service needs including those disadvantaged socio-economically<br><br>**Healthy engaged communities**<br>• More people participating in physical activities<br>• Better mental health and wellbeing outcomes<br>• Everyone responsible for alcohol (and drug) harm minimisation<br>• More residents engaged in sustainable living<br>• Improved capacity to deliver community health and wellbeing outcomes | **Services and information**<br>• Accessible, flexible, people-focused and responsive to the needs of people with a disability, their families and carers<br><br>**Built and natural environments**<br>• Well designed, accessible for all and capable of adapting to future needs<br><br>**Community participation**<br>• Everyone can contribute to Council's decision-making and participate in community activities<br><br>**Promoting inclusion**<br>• Engendering practices that address discrimination and support inclusion<br><br>**Council workforce**<br>• Embracing diversity and responsive to the needs and aspirations of people with a disability |

**Various other Council plans and strategies sit alongside this one, including:**

• *Positive Ageing Strategy 2015-18* (being developed concurrently with the *Early Years and Youth Strategy 2015-18)*

• *Municipal Strategic Statement,* which defines planning measures to address development pressures, specifically those relating to activity centres and housing, transport and recreation options

• *Arts and Culture Strategy 2009-14,* which includes strategies to engage schools, youth and seniors in arts-related activities to build community wellbeing and connectedness (currently under review)

• *Recreation Strategy 2010,* containing recommendations relating to providing facilities, programs and services to enable people of all ages and interests to participate in a diverse range of leisure activities, and the

• *Pathways Strategy 2012, Playground Strategy 2011*, *Open Space Strategy 2015-25* (under development) and *Municipal Emergency Management Plan 2013.*

The links between all these documents indicate a need for this strategy to extend its focus beyond the services planning and delivery ambit of its predecessor to engender a whole-of-Council response to the needs of Surf Coast's young citizens and their families.

## 5.1.2 Early Years Unit

The work of Council's Early Years Unit supports the care, developmental and socialisation needs of Surf Coast's young citizens from birth to 25 years. Current programs and services are developed and implemented with a focus on community development and engagement. Services provided by Council include maternal and child health, three-year-old activity and kindergarten cluster programs, family day care, occasional care, vacation care and youth development.

The table below summarises the outcomes of the desktop research and community consultation, which identified the unit's key strengths and challenges, separated into early years and youth cohorts, as the basis for determining key themes and issues to be addressed by this strategy.

| Internal strengths | Internal challenges |
| --- | --- |
| **Early Years** | |
| • Programs comply fully with relevant Commonwealth and State Government legislation, frameworks and standards | • Ongoing capacity to meet increased demand for early years services (eg occasional child care, family day care, vacation care) as population grows |
| • Universal access principles apply to all Council kindergartens | • Extent of Council's ability to fund internally/ secure external funding for essential infrastructure to support service delivery (eg Torquay North Children's Hub) |
| • Effectiveness of Early Years Reference Groups in developing and delivering new and existing services on an ongoing basis | • Ongoing need to improve access to Maternal and Child Health Services, parent education and other services, particularly for vulnerable families |
| • Information regularly communicated to clients via reference groups, newsletter/s and website | • Ongoing work needed to market and communicate early years services, including developing and funding community spaces in key townships |
| • Processes in place to seek client feedback (eg via surveys) | • Limited capacity to further expand range and availability of parent education and support services, including early intervention and ongoing support for vulnerable families |
| • Efficiencies achieved via implementation of cluster management model at Torquay, Lorne, Jan Juc and Winchelsea kindergartens, including centralised enrolment process | • Outmoded paper-based application process is inefficient, open to human error and not client-friendly |
| • Strong links with related service providers, including via early years network meetings | • Ability to cater for changing work and lifestyle patterns (eg non-working dads, both parents working, commuting) |
| • Quality services delivered as per independent assessments against national frameworks and standards | • Need to build regular monitoring, reporting and evaluation measures into new strategy |
| • Demonstrated capacity to involve clients (ie parents and children) and the community in specific projects (eg Children's Week, redevelopment of Torquay and Jan Juc kindergartens) | • Developing processes to maximise use of relevant data to improve services planning and delivery across early years and youth cohorts |
| • Strong parent education program running in Torquay | • Keeping abreast of communication technologies as a means of improving our communication with more 'tech-savvy' communities |
| • Accessibility and maintenance of existing community infrastructure (eg playgrounds) | • Administration requirements related to early years participation in the National Disability Insurance Scheme trial (to be addressed through Surf Coast Shire Council Positive Ageing Strategy 2015-18) |
| • Skilled, professional and committed workforce as evidenced by high attraction/low turnover rates | |
| • Existing strategy (2009-13) embedded into unit business plans and staff performance review plans | |
| • High quality data sources and resources (eg id.profiles, health and wellbeing profiles) | |

| Internal strengths | Internal challenges |
|---|---|
| **Youth** | |
| • Small committed team with clear sense of purpose (ie facilitating youth development and outreach activities)<br><br>• Young people's input into youth activities provided via volunteer youth committees/ networks<br><br>• Effective processes in place to plan and successfully deliver key youth events (eg School Leavers, FReeZA)<br><br>• Compliance with Office for Youth and other related State and Federal Government funding initiatives<br><br>• Programs well regarded in the youth sector as evidenced by Council's involvement in an Australian Drug Foundation reference group and use of the Winchelsea Skate Park as a case study<br><br>• High profile of skate parks in townships as vital social hubs for young people (although need to consider alternatives for non-skaters) | • Limited resources restrict capacity to extend current program further<br><br>• Short-term nature of grant funding has potentially significant implications for ongoing program and services development<br><br>• With no current strategy (previous one expired in 2009), the program has developed more organically than strategically over the past five years<br><br>• General misconceptions amongst the community about what Council does or doesn't do for local young people in relation to services, funding, etc<br><br>• Reaching Surf Coast's late youth (19-25 years) cohort<br><br>• Operating in a 'loose' regulatory environment has the potential to lead to the development of youth services/ programs that may not be in young people's best interests (eg tokenistic, poorly targeted)<br><br>• Need to improve routine reporting and evaluation of programs and activities internally<br><br>• Addressing young people's needs in light of ongoing changes since last strategy was developed<br><br>• Overcoming young people's natural reticence and other barriers (eg parental) to ongoing consultation and feedback as evidenced during the community engagement process for the new strategy |

## 5.2    External environment

Ongoing political and economic volatility are key influences of Surf Coast's current external environment. Changes at the State and Federal Government level could result in policy and economic shifts that impact on the planning and delivery of services and programs for families, children and young people in Surf Coast Shire.

The early years sector has already undergone significant reform over the past few years (eg introduction of the National Quality Framework, changes to hours funded and staffing ratios in 2016), with State and Federal Government continuing to drive through additional reforms, which may include implementing the Productivity Commission's recommendations from its Inquiry into Child Care and Early Childhood Learning and the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The effects of this environment mean Council will need to continually review future reforms and policy changes, including those currently unknown, and consider its response at the local level. This may impact on the organisation's capacity to effectively plan and deliver services to the community. Existing services will also need to adapt to new models and standards as these are rolled-out.

While the Australian economy weathered the impacts of the recent global financial crisis, the past two years have seen signs of the domestic economy starting to slow down. In this economic environment, Council's ability to deliver services and infrastructure is impacted by the availability of government funding. In addition, the combination of political and economic forces is likely to drive future service demand.

Key social factors include population and demographic trends, which are outlined in the next section. These are expected to present Council with substantial challenges, including:

- ongoing population growth continuing to drive demand for services and community infrastructure, with changing demographics shaping how these are developed and delivered

- urban development in Torquay-Jan Juc and surrounding areas (eg Armstrong Creek) contributing to significant changes in Surf Coast's sense of place, and

- responding to the increasingly complex and dynamic needs of our population (eg socio-economic, health and wellbeing).

Recognition of the importance of investing in the early years and youth cohorts has grown significantly as the evidence-base has continued to build over the past decade. Delivering high quality, integrated, accessible services focused on young citizens' developmental needs (ie physical, intellectual, social) is critical to helping them achieve their full potential throughout their lives.

Early intervention, addressing vulnerability, and building the capacity of families and communities to improve outcomes for children and young people are also vital. For the youth cohort, education and employment represent significant social factors in keeping young people connected and engaged with their communities. The benefits include significantly reduced public expenditure on health, education, employment and crime.

Technology continues to develop at an ever increasing pace. Like other organisations, Council will need to stay abreast of technological developments as a means of building its organisational capacity to respond to community needs as they change.

## 5.2.1 Opportunities and challenges

The table below summarises the opportunities and challenges the external environment currently presents in terms of Council's early years and youth programs. The strategy aims to address these by focusing on building Council's capacity in critical areas (eg advocacy).

| External opportunities | External challenges |
|---|---|
| **Early Years** | |
| • Addressing key directions of the State Government's Early Years Strategic Plan 2014-20 and Early Years Outcomes Framework at the local level via the new Early Years and Youth Strategy 2015-18 | • Potential impacts of change of government following state election, including funding commitments met or unmet, new policy/ strategic directions and administrative changes |
| • Improvements and efficiencies generated via State Government's Strengthening Kindergarten Cluster Management (KCM) project due for implementation Mar 2015 | • Need to adapt to changes generated by Kindergarten Cluster Management model review |
| • Torquay's 2012 Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) results may provide a model for achieving similar results across other Surf Coast locales | • Addressing areas of improvement identified by latest AEDI assessment, particularly Winchelsea |
| • Recommendations emerging from final report of Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Child Care and Early Childhood Learning | • Potential need to adapt to changes in Federal Government policy generated by the Productivity Commission's final report |
| • Improvements generated by review of National Quality Framework (NQF) for Early Childhood Education and Childcare – regulatory impact statement consultation process in progress | • Adapting to any changes to the NQF emerging from the current review |
| • Building ongoing partnerships via the new National Disability Insurance Scheme rollout | • Implementing Victoria's Vulnerable Children Strategy and Action Plan across early years services |
| | • Introduction of Out of Home Care agreement |
| | • Providing child care across townships to meet their specific needs |
| | • Uneven population distribution across townships ranging from a major centre (Torquay) to smaller rural communities showing little or no growth in the early years/youth cohorts |
| | • National Disability Insurance Scheme rollout and implementation |
| | • Recommendations emerging from final report of Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Child Care and Early Childhood Learning |
| **Youth** | |
| • Ongoing demographic changes in Surf Coast Shire's youth population | • Absence of coherent policy framework for youth sector with no statutory requirement for councils to have a clearly articulated approach to meeting young people's needs |
| • Social media as an avenue to communicate and engage with youth locally, nationally and internationally | • Impacts of proposed Federal Government changes to education and youth support schemes |
| • Scope to respond to the unmet needs of Surf Coast Shire's middle years (ie 8-11 years) population | • Impacts of change of State Government largely unknown at this time |
| • Scope to leverage off Surf Coast's natural (eg beaches) and built (eg skate parks) to meet young people's social and recreational needs | • Establishing effective partnerships to respond to young people's diverse needs across a broad spectrum encompassing health and wellbeing (ie addressing alcohol/drugs, sexual and mental health issues), social (eg entertainment options, transport), education and employment |
| • Growing numbers of local young people attending secondary school in Surf Coast Shire (as opposed to travelling into Geelong) | • Young people staying at home longer |
| | • Employment for young people |
| | • Surf Coast continues to enjoy many health and wellbeing strengths but ongoing growth and change is driving several areas of concern (eg alcohol, housing affordability, community safety) |

## 5.3    Our community

Surf Coast Shire offers an idyllic combination of coastal, rural and bushland environments, making it a desirable place to live, work, play and visit. As such, the municipality is recognised as one of Victoria's fastest growing municipalities with its estimated total resident population growing from 20,556 in 2001 to 30,299 in 2015. Over the life of this plan, the population is forecast to grow to 33,421 by 2018 and to 44,786 by 2031.

Based on 2011 census data, children and young people represent close to one-third (31.9%) of Surf Coast Shire's total population with the early years (0-11 years) age group comprising 17.3 per cent and the youth (12-24 years) 14.6 per cent. Current population forecasts indicate early years will grow 24 percent and youth 20 per cent between 2011 and 2018.

This trend is however inconsistent across Surf Coast townships. While Torquay, for example, continues to experience solid growth across all age groups (eg third highest in percentage of 0-4 year olds in regional Victoria), forecasts for smaller townships like Anglesea, Aireys Inlet, Lorne and Deans Marsh show little or no growth in their early years and youth populations.

Other relevant trends emerging from the demographic analysis include:

- the impacts of part-time and tourist populations, specifically the tripling of Surf Coast's total population during summer peak periods and year-round holiday home owners
- continuing 'sea change' migration of young families and retirees, which is driving growing demand for early years and youth services
- strongest forecast growth in the shire for children and young people in Torquay North
- higher than Victorian average fertility rates with a shire average of 330 births per year in the last five years
- anticipated population growth in neighbouring municipalities (eg Armstrong Creek)
- young people leaving Surf Coast to pursue education, employment and social opportunities in Geelong and Melbourne, and
- the development of new community infrastructure (eg Surf Coast Secondary College) reducing the need to travel out of Surf Coast for certain services.

Appendix II offers more detailed information about the demographic data.

### 5.3.1 Our young citizens' thoughts and aspirations

The outcomes of the community consultation process provided insights into the thoughts and aspirations of Surf Coast's children, young people and their families. While the primary focus was on ascertaining their expectations and levels of satisfaction with Council services, the process also provided an opportunity for feedback on broader aspects of the local community outside Council's control. These are noted in the community engagement report (Appendix III).

Key early years and youth issues arising from the consultation include:

- the need for services (eg child care) to respond to change (eg in townships' demographic profiles, people's lifestyles and work patterns) in terms of locations, hours, service type
- making it easier for people to get around on foot, by car, public transport and other viable means, which includes providing sufficient parking
- recognising and responding to young people's increasingly complex needs (eg mental health, living at home for longer, unemployment), including by providing youth programs in smaller townships and addressing young women's specific needs, particularly those not interested in sport or skate parks
- the importance of exercise and recreation to children and young people's development with unanimous support for a local year-round swimming pool
- ensuring people know what's going on in their community, including services and activities on offer, with many indicating Council's current communication channels are often not reaching them (or being unaware of how to access Council information themselves)
- fees and charges for services and activities are a concern for many young families and young people
- responding to the specific care and development needs of our youngest citizens (0-3 years) to support key stages before pre-school/kindergarten, including early intervention where needed
- providing parent education programs to support effective parenting through key transitional stages and associated issues, and
- the need to respond to more families with a child (or children) with a disability as Surf Coast's population continues to grow.

# 6. Key themes and issues

Table 4 identifies five key themes, based on analysis of the consolidated research outcomes, as critical focus areas for the strategy:

| Key theme | Goal | How we will achieve our goal |
|---|---|---|
| **Access** (Internally driven/ externally focused) | **We make it easier for our community to access:** <br>• services <br>• information <br>• facilities and infrastructure <br>• open spaces <br>• events and activities | **Initiatives to:** <br>• improve health and wellbeing <br>• support learning and development <br>• improve accessibility and inclusion <br>• communicate effectively with different audiences |
| **Knowledge** (Externally driven/ internally focused) | **We build our knowledge to enable us to:** <br>• understand our community and its needs, now and in future <br>• plan and respond to these needs <br>• build relationships with our community | **Building our knowledge via:** <br>• use of data/demographics <br>• community engagement/input <br>• advocacy <br>• networks and partnerships <br>• customer service response processes |
| **Connection** Internally and externally driven/ externally focused) | **We create opportunities for people to:** <br>• connect with others <br>• participate and contribute <br>• feel part of their community | **Activities to:** <br>• inform people <br>• promote community connectedness <br>• encourage participation (including volunteering) <br>• build resilience |
| **Quality frameworks** (Externally driven/ internally focused) | **We fulfil our obligations under Federal and State Government legislation and policy through compliance with:** <br>• funding agreements <br>• industry regulations, standards and models <br>• quality and accreditation | **Council has:** <br>• policies, principles, processes and practices in place to support performance requirements <br>• capacity to adapt to policy reforms and major sector change |
| **Change** (Internally driven/ externally focused) | **We plan ahead to enable our services and programs to adapt to change by:** <br>• planning for population growth/ demographic change <br>• promoting sustainability <br>• focusing on community safety and security <br>• identifying emerging trends/ future scenarios | **Infrastructure, facilities, programs and services:** <br>• respond to community's growing/ changing needs <br>• contribute to community safety and sustainability <br>• support community development and capacity building |

## 6.1 Issues to consider

The following key issues emerged from the research for Council to be aware of in developing and implementing this strategy:

- ongoing Federal and State Government policy reforms (eg changes to family day care funding, Reform of the Federation White Paper: Roles and Responsibilities in Education – Part A: Early Childhood and Schools, December 2014) requiring Council to change its service focus and practice – while Council doesn't control this reform agenda, it can control its response

- recognising the differences between the early years and youth sectors, particularly in terms of legislative frameworks and focus – while both sit in Council's Early Years Unit, one team (Early Years) operates within tight legislative constraints and is focused on providing services; the other (Youth Development) focuses on facilitating activities within a very 'loose' regulatory environment

- acknowledging the key stages and transitions across the 0-25 age group as indicated in the table below – Council's current service focus is predominantly on the early years group (although the middle years group may access vacation care) and facilitating activities for the youth group; greater consideration could be given to the needs of the middle years and late youth age groups (resources permitting), and

- responding to community expectations in relation to transport, which many people identified as being critical to accessing services, activities and the like – Council is not responsible for public transport but can influence government decision-making through needs analyses, planning and advocacy activities, as articulated in the Council Plan 2013-17.

| Stage and age | Transition milestones |
|---|---|
| **Early years: 0-8 years** (Baby and child) | • Baby/toddler (Maternal and Child Health)<br>• Kindergarten<br>• Early primary school |
| **Middle years: 9-11 years** (Pre-adolescent) | • Late primary school<br>• Preparing for secondary school |
| **Youth: 12-18 years** (Adolescent) | • Secondary school<br>• Work experience/part-time roles |
| **Late youth: 19-25 years** (Early adulthood) | • Post-secondary education and/or<br>• Work |

# 7. Supporting young citizens in realising their full potential

This section outlines Council's approach to supporting Surf Coast Shire's young citizens in achieving their full potential based on the concept of an 'all ages friendly community'. It describes the principles, goals and objectives Council will pursue over the next three years to address the key themes and issues identified in the previous section as critical to fostering young people's development and wellbeing.

## 7.1 Overarching strategic goal and scope

Working together, with our community, our partners and others to support Surf Coast Shire's young citizens in realising their full potential.

We achieve this by delivering services, developing networks, facilitating programs and creating opportunities for young people to:

- develop physically and mentally throughout their formative years
- enjoy good health and wellbeing into adulthood
- learn and grow intellectually
- connect and socialise with their peers
- engage with the wider community
- have a say in decisions impacting on them, and
- build resilience.

## 7.2 Guiding principles for our 'all ages friendly community'

The concept of an 'all ages friendly community' is taken from international, national and state protocols pertaining to 'Child Friendly' and 'Age Friendly' cities and communities. These focus on creating and adapting structures and services to be accessible and inclusive to all citizens regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, ability or any other distinguishing factor.

With this concept in mind, the following guiding principles have been developed to underpin the strategy and its implementation:

1. **Accessible and inclusive –** Surf Coast Shire's built and natural environments, services and facilities, information, events and activities are readily accessible to all citizens.

2. **Safe and supportive –** Surf Coast Shire provides its citizens with safe, supportive environments and open spaces.

3. **Responsive –** Our programs, services and policies are responsive to our citizen's needs, taking into account the specific requirements of each life stage from birth to old age.

4. **Providing opportunities to participate –** All Surf Coast citizens actively participate, socialise and have fun in the community.

5. **Respect and dignity –** All citizens have the right to express their opinions and contribute to decisions about their communities and wellbeing.

6. **Diversity –** Our communities and citizens are characterised by their diverse attributes and needs that require targeted approaches rather than a 'one size fits all'.

7. **Holistic –** We work together as an organisation, with our community, government and other organisations to create an 'all ages friendly community' for all citizens.

## 7.3 Goals and guiding principles and actions

Table 6 articulates five broad goals related to the key themes described in Section 6, and matched against the guiding principles above and the objectives set down in the Council Plan and other significant strategic documents. It also establishes a series of objectives and key outcomes under each goal.

# Goal 1 - ACCESS: We make it easy for young citizens and their families to access what they need.

**All young citizens have access to services, information, facilities and infrastructure, activities and events to support them in ageing positively via initiatives to:**

- improve health and wellbeing
- support learning and development
- improve accessibility and inclusion
- communicate effectively

**Links with:**

- Council Plan objectives – 1.5, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 3.3, 4.2, 4.4, 5.4
- Health and Wellbeing Plan objectives – 1.3, 2.2, 2.3. 3.1, 3.3, 3.4
- Access and Inclusion Plan outcomes – 1, 2

**Meets guiding principles:** 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7

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**Objective 1.1** Continue to develop and promote service access for early year's key developmental stages focusing on supporting parents to meet their children's wellbeing and development needs.

| Key outcomes | Council roles | Partners |
|---|---|---|
| • Service plans include marketing/ promotion<br>• More accessible information (eg website)<br>• Internal processes support access<br>• Client feedback identifies issues<br>• Effective partnerships with related service providers | • Early Years and Youth Coordinator<br>• Team Leaders<br>• Comms and Community Engagement | Early years networks (EYN), local reference groups (LRG), Department of Education and Training/ Health and Human Services, local GPs/ service providers |

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**Objective 1.2** Pursue integrated service/information provision and intergenerational activities and programs.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| • Infrastructure knowledge base<br>• Future infrastructure plan<br>• Feasible options identified and in place<br>• Funding applications for new spaces/ leisure and wellbeing programs<br>• Access and Inclusion Plan actions embedded in actions and outcomes<br>• Higher awareness of early years and youth services | • Early Years and Youth Coordinator<br>• Positive Ageing Coordinator<br>• Team Leaders<br>• Infrastructure<br>• Planning and Environment | EYN, LRG, funding bodies, service providers/ community groups in each township |

## Objective 1.3    Facilitate the ability of young people (ie 12-25 years) to access information, making it easier for them to get what they need.

**Key outcomes**

- Feasible options identified and in place (eg youth portal, phone apps, social media, website)
- Comms tools and messages 'hit the mark'
- Access and CALD standards met

**Council roles**

- Early Years and Youth Coordinator
- Youth Development Team
- Comms and Community Engagement
- Information Technology

**Partners**

EYN, LRG, youth network, local youth reference group, funding bodies, providers

## Objective 1.4    Ensure Council's planning, community infrastructure and advocacy programs provide for young citizens' access needs.

- Advocacy program
- Major projects consider young citizens' needs

**Council roles**

- Aged and Family Services Manager
- Community Relations
- Access Officer
- Infrastructure
- Planning and Environment

**Partners**

EYN, LRG, All Abilities Advisory Committee, funding bodies

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**We will know we have succeeded when we see:**

- **effective partnerships and integrated service delivery across service providers**
- **intergenerational activities across early years, youth and older age groups**
- **communication and engagement options aimed at young citizens embedded in the organisation, and**
- **young citizens and their family's needs represented in our advocacy efforts.**

# Goal 2 - KNOWLEDGE: We build and use knowledge to respond to the needs of young citizens and their families.

**A solid knowledge base enables us to understand our community and its needs, to plan and respond to these needs, and to build relationships via:**

- use of data/demographics
- community engagement/input
- advocacy
- networks and partnerships
- customer service response processes

**Links with:**

- Council Plan objectives – 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1
- Health and Wellbeing Plan objectives – 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4
- Access and Inclusion Plan outcomes – 3, 4

**Meets guiding principles:** 3, 5, 6, 7

## Objective 2.1    Maximise use of available data to better inform services/program planning and delivery on an annual basis.

| Key outcomes | Council roles | Partners |
|---|---|---|
| • Improved knowledge by township and sector<br>• Informed service plans | • Social Planner<br>• Early Years and Youth Coordinator<br>• Information Technology | Department of Education and Training/ Health, data/ service providers, G21, Deakin University |

## Objective 2.2    Continue to strengthen our interagency partnerships for early years and youth sectors to build industry knowledge, improve best practice and inform funding availability.

| Key outcomes | Council roles | Partners |
|---|---|---|
| • Skills and knowledge development<br>• Integrated services approach<br>• Joint funding submissions<br>• Potential joint/ shared service delivery models identified<br>• Wider Council knowledge of whole sector | • Early Years and Youth Coordinator<br>• Team Leaders<br>• Team Members | EYN, G21, neighbouring municipalities, Department of Education and Training |

**Objective 2.3    Consult and engage with children, the wider community and internal stakeholders to ensure the needs of young citizens and their families are reflected in Council's services and program planning.**

| Key outcomes | Council roles | Partners |
|---|---|---|
| • Community engagement program<br>• Informed service/ quality improvement plans<br>• Voices represented in broader engagement processes (eg Council Plan) | • Early Years and Youth Coordinator<br>• Comms and Community Engagement<br>• Team Leaders<br>• Information Technology | LRG, youth networks/ committees, kindergarten committees of management |

**Objective 2.4    Support services and program planning on an ongoing basis.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| • Improved planning, monitoring and evaluation processes and reporting | • Early Years and Youth Coordinator<br>• Team Leaders<br>• Survey Team | Service providers |

**We will know we have succeeded when we see:**

- **children's voices represented in our broader communication and engagement processes**

- **interagency partnership approaches to funding and service planning**

- **increased use of data informing service development, and**

- **regular reports and evaluation of projects, programs and services.**

# Goal 3 - CONNECTION:
# We facilitate connections between young citizens, their families and the Surf Coast community.

**Opportunities are available for young citizens and their families to connect with others, participate and contribute, and feel part of the Surf Coast community via activities that:**

- inform people
- promote community connectedness
- encourage participation (including volunteering)
- build resilience

**Links with:**

- Council Plan objectives – 1.5, 3.3, 3.4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3
- Health and Wellbeing Plan objectives – 1.2, 1.3, 2.2, 2.3, 3.4
- Access and Inclusion Plan outcomes – 1, 2, 3, 4

**Meets guiding principles:** All (1-7)

**Objective 3.1  Explore existing and new avenues within current services and programs for promoting community connections, including for people new to the area.**

| Key outcomes | Council roles | Partners |
|---|---|---|
| • Key connections identified/ listed/promoted<br>• Increased participation in community activities | • Early Years and Youth Coordinator<br>• Team Leaders<br>• Comms and Community Engagement | Service providers, schools, play groups, EYN, LRG, youth networks/ committees |

**Objective 3.2  Actively work with local communities to facilitate initiatives encouraging connection/ participation, including opportunities for intergenerational relationships.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| • Activities and events supported (eg community grants)<br>• Increased options for intergenerational activities | • Early Years and Youth Coordinator<br>• Team Leaders | Community groups, sporting groups, funding bodies |

## Objective 3.3    Investigate ways of facilitating connections for people who are hard-to-reach/overlooked.

| Key outcomes | Council roles | Partners |
|---|---|---|
| • Needs mapped and providers identified<br>• Partnerships strengthened/ established<br>• Programs delivered/ promoted<br>• Digital platforms in place<br>• Promotion and/or training programs<br>• Usage results | • Early Years and Youth Coordinator<br>• Youth Development Team<br>• Comms and Community Engagement<br>• Information Technology | EYN, LRG, youth network, local youth reference group, service providers, community groups |

## Objective 3.4    Continue to advocate ensuring all services and infrastructure support community connection.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| • Advocacy program reflects young citizens/families' needs | • Aged and Family Services Manager<br>• Community Relations Manager | G21, neighbouring municipalities, allied bodies |

**We will know we have succeeded when we see:**

• increased community participation in early years and youth activities

• increased opportunities for intergenerational activities, and

• improved engagement with hard-to-reach groups.

# Goal 4 – QUALITY FRAMEWORKS: Our direct services and programs meet quality framework standards.

**Our services and programs meet Federal and State Government legislative and policy requirements, comply with funding agreements, industry regulations, standards, and models, and achieve quality accreditation because we have:**

- policies, principles, processes and practices in place to support performance requirements

- capacity to adapt to policy reforms and major sector change

**Links with:**

- Council Plan objectives – 2.1, 2.2, 3.2

- Health and Wellbeing Plan objectives – 2.2, 2.3

- Access and Inclusion Plan outcomes – 2, 4, 5

**Meets guiding principles:** 1, 2, 3, 7

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**Objective 4.1** **Ensure direct services and programs meet legislative requirements, funding agreement terms, best practice frameworks and industry standards.**

| Key outcomes | Council roles | Partners |
|---|---|---|
| - Quality/service improvement plans fully compliant<br>- Assessment ratings achieved<br>- Funding agreements met | - Early Years and Youth | Department of Education and Training / Health/ Human Services, EYN, LRG, G21, allied bodies |

**Objective 4.2** **Continue to improve governance arrangements, including regular reporting to Council, funding bodies and clients/community.**

| Key outcomes | Council roles | Partners |
|---|---|---|
| - High quality, timely reports<br>- Funding outcome reports<br>- Client/community reports | - Aged and Family Services Manager<br>- Early Years and Youth | Compliance bodies, funding bodies, relevant government agencies |

**We will know we have succeeded when we see:**

- service improvement plans in place and regularly monitored
- assessment ratings achieved, and
- increased reporting to Council and the community on our program and service achievements.

# Goal 5 - CHANGE: We plan ahead to enable our services and programs to adapt to change.

**Outcome: Services, programs, facilities and community infrastructure are available to respond to our community's changing needs because we plan ahead to:**

- prepare for population growth/demographic change
- promote sustainability
- contribute to community safety and security
- identify emerging trends and future scenarios
- support community development and capacity building

Links with:

- Council Plan objectives – 1.3, 1.4, 2.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 5.4
- Health and Wellbeing Plan objectives – 1.4, 1.5, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.2, 3.4
- Access and Inclusion Plan outcomes – 1, 2, 4

Meets guiding principles: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7

## Objective 5.1    Build organisational capacity to adapt to ongoing policy and sector reforms through effective planning.

| Key outcomes | Council roles | Partners |
|---|---|---|
| • Service reviews/ feasibility studies inform services planning and delivery<br>• Policies and procedures in place<br>• Program evaluation informs ongoing planning and delivery | • Aged and Family Services Manager<br>• Early Years and Youth Coordinator<br>• Team Leaders | EYN, LRG, relevant government departments, clients |

## 5.2    Build organisational capacity to stay abreast of and respond to population growth, demographic and other significant changes (eg political, economic, social, technological).

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| • Environmental scanning, future scenario planning and demographic analysis informs services planning | • Aged and Family Services Manager<br>• Early Years and Youth Coordinator<br>• Social Planner | Department of Health the Human Services/ Education and training, research bodies |

## 5.3     Advocate on community's behalf to ensure critical gaps in services/program provision and community infrastructure are adequately addressed.

| Key outcomes | Council roles | Partners |
|---|---|---|
| • Service reviews inform advocacy program | Early Years and Youth Coordinator<br><br>Team Leaders | Relevant government departments, funding bodies, G21, neighbouring municipalities, allied bodies, client/community networks and groups |

**We will know we have succeeded when we see:**

- service planning and development in response to demographic changes

- service reviews completed and informing future needs and opportunities for early years and youth, and

- successful advocacy for services, infrastructure and programs for our growing community.

# 8. Implementation

**Implementing the strategy involves identifying and prioritising key actions under each goal, in consultation with internal and external stakeholders, as the basis for developing annual action plans aligned to Council's Strategic Resource Plan and annual budget**

The annual action plan details actions under each goal and identifies who is responsible for leading their implementation along with key outputs and measures. As the strategy has been developed around a whole-of Council approach, many sections of the organisation are involved in implementing various actions as designated in the document and the action plan.

The Aged and Family Services Manager and Early Years and Youth Coordinator are jointly responsible for coordinating the strategy's implementation in partnership with team members, other designated units/Council officers and the partners/stakeholders identified in this document.

Progress will be regularly monitored and reported internally, via reports to the Executive Management Team and Council, and externally via the channels identified in Section 9.

# 9. Communication and community engagement

**The draft strategy will be subject to Council's public exhibition process, which involves inviting community feedback before the both documents are finalised and adopted by Council. In addition, the various organisations, groups and individuals who contributed input to the strategy's development, via the community engagement process, will be invited to provide feedback.**

A communications and community engagement plan will be developed and implemented for:

• the public exhibition/final consultation phase

• communicating Council's progress in implementing the strategy following its adoption by Council, and

• seeking community input to the strategy's review and evaluation process (outlined below) as the basis for its continuous improvement and further development.

Activities may include client newsletters, information bulletins, Groundswell, annual reports and digital technologies, subject to the outcomes of initiatives currently underway (eg development of Council's new Communication and Community Engagement Strategy) or identified in this strategy relating to communicating and engaging with young citizens and their families.

# 10. Review and evaluation

**As a living document, the strategy will be subject to ongoing review and evaluation against the specific measures in each annual action plan, aligning with the goals and outcomes articulated in this document.**

The Aged and Family Services Manager and Early Years and Youth Coordinator will lead a review of the strategy every 12 months against annual action plan measures and outcomes.

The review outcomes will inform the development of an annual report to Council on overall progress towards achieving the strategy's goals and outcomes. It will also assist in identifying opportunities for improvement and key priorities for the year ahead as the basis for developing the annual action plan and for realigning strategies, if needed, to ensure their ongoing relevance to Council's operations and the Surf Coast Shire community.

In addition, the review will also offer opportunities to celebrate and promote our achievements, strengthen networks and partnerships, and inform resource allocation and other related plans and polices.

The review process itself may involve seeking community and partner input as part of Council's commitment to ongoing communication and community engagement during the strategy's life, as outlined above.